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First report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1829 (2008), by which the Council authorized, with effect from 1 October 2008, the establishment of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) and requested, in paragraph 9, that it be kept informed every four months on the implementation of the mission's mandate. Accordingly, the present report covers the activities of the mission and developments in Sierra Leone from 1 October 2008 to 31 January 2009.

II. Establishment of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone

2. The transition from the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) to UNIPSIL proceeded as planned, with extensive consultations among United Nations agencies, programmes and funds, culminating in the adoption of a Joint Vision of the United Nations Family for Sierra Leone. That vision reflects a strategic framework that outlines common priority areas as well as joint United Nations operational and logistical arrangements. Accordingly, UNIPSIL brings together the political, development and humanitarian mandates of the United Nations family in Sierra Leone so as to provide integrated support to the Government in fostering peace and stability and advancing social and economic development.

3. UNIPSIL has a total strength of 73, including both international and national staff. The Office is headed by my Executive Representative in Sierra Leone, Michael von der Schulenburg. The mission has a small office to support the work of my Executive Representative and five substantive units, namely, a Political Affairs and Peace Consolidation Section; a Human Rights and Rule of Law Section; a Democratic Institutions Section; a Police and Security Section; and a Joint Strategic Planning Unit.

4. The Planning Unit provides strategic policy support and a coordination mechanism that integrates political, development and humanitarian activities for the entire United Nations system in Sierra Leone. The Unit supports the strategic

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engagement of the Executive Representative and the United Nations system with the Government of Sierra Leone, the major donors and the Peacebuilding Commission.

5. The Political Affairs and Peace Consolidation Section leads the mission's efforts in promoting dialogue and the peaceful resolution of disputes among key national stakeholders with a view to ensuring reconciliation and national cohesion.

6. The Human Rights and Rule of Law Section provides support for the strengthening of the rule of law and the promotion and protection of human rights in Sierra Leone. It provides policy support, technical advice and advocacy for the strengthening of the national Human Rights Commission, as well as the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

7. The Democratic Institutions Section spearheads the efforts of UNIPSIL in providing support for the consolidation and expansion of multiparty democracy and good governance in Sierra Leone. It provides policy and technical advice to Parliament, the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Decentralization Secretariat, including on the issue of public sector reform. The Section collaborates closely with national and local governance institutions in building the capacity of local councils. The Section will also oversee the transfer of United Nations Radio to the Government of Sierra Leone through the formation of an independent broadcasting entity.

8. The Police and Security Section leads the mission's efforts in providing support to the Sierra Leone police, the Office of National Security and other security sector institutions.

III. Political developments

9. The political situation remained stable and positive during the reporting period, as the country continued to build on the momentum created by the peaceful and democratic transfer of power from one elected Government to another in September 2007. Despite a climate of distrust between the former ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), now the major opposition party, and the All Peoples' Congress (APC), which is currently in power, the overall interaction between the two major parties continues to evolve in a largely constructive and cordial manner.

10. The Government has made the fight against corruption a key element of its reform platform. To that end, and as part of its anti-corruption agenda, the Government has taken steps aimed at ensuring greater transparency and accountability in public affairs. Under the Open Government Initiative, sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the President, Ernest Bai Koroma, the Vice-President, Sahr Sam-Sumana, and Government Ministers recently held question-and-answer sessions with the public on economic, political and social issues. The Government also continues to promote a campaign aimed at changing attitudes and has called on the people of Sierra Leone to view with seriousness their civic obligations to the country.

11. On 15 October, the Government established a Commission of Inquiry to examine the use of donor funds by the previous, SLPP, Administration. SLPP complained that the inquiry was not independent and also that it was open-ended.

President Koroma provided strong assurances that the inquiry was not a witch-hunt, but a measure aimed at preventing any misuse of such funds in the future.

12. UNIPSIL maintained close contacts with the political parties and continued to emphasize the need for dialogue and national cohesion in the aftermath of recent national and local elections that witnessed ethnic and regional divides in the country. UNIPSIL also worked to encourage the resumption of political dialogue through the revival of the All Political Parties Association and the rejuvenation of the Political Parties Registration Commission.

13. Chieftaincy disputes remained a major challenge for both the political and the legal processes. On 5 November, the Paramount Chief of Biriwa chiefdom, in Bombali district, was suspended by the Government following a finding by an administrative inquiry that his appointment had not been made in accordance with proper procedure, through an election conducted by the National Electoral Commission. The Paramount Chief had been appointed to office during the SLPP Administration. A judicial commission of inquiry has also been established to review the conclusions of the administrative inquiry. However the suspension of the Paramount Chief continued to generate tensions between the Limba and Mandingo ethnic groups in the community.

14. The Government continued to make concerted efforts to refocus national attention on the massive development challenges facing the country. To that end, it sought to project the image of Sierra Leone not only as a country that had successfully emerged from conflict, but also as a country committed to promoting reforms and broadening its international relationships.

15. In that connection, and in the light of recent security challenges in the subregion, on 10 December Sierra Leone hosted a summit of Heads of State of the Mano River Union. President Koroma welcomed to the summit the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the President of Cote d'Ivoire, Laurent Gbagbo, and the Prime Minister of Guinea, Ahmed Tidiane Souaré. The leaders reaffirmed their strong commitment to work together to overcome challenges facing the subregion and called for the establishment of joint border security and confidence-building units in all States of the Mano River Union and for strengthened economic and military cooperation, as well as measures to ensure food security.

16. The Yenga border dispute between Guinea and Sierra Leone remained unresolved. However, both countries continue to engage in diplomatic consultations on the matter. The Government established a high-level committee, comprising the Vice-President and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Defence, Internal Affairs and Information, to continue to address the issue.

IV. Economic and social developments

17. Overall macroeconomic performance in 2008 has been mixed. Real growth in gross domestic product in 2008 reached an encouraging 6 per cent, underpinned by expansion in the agriculture, construction and service sectors. However, a slowdown in mining activities following the suspension of operations by Koidu Holdings, as well as the collapse of the second dredge at a Sierra Rutile mining site and the deterioration in the external economic environment, constitute major impediments to overall economic growth.

18. In spite of efforts by the National Revenue Authority to intensify revenue mobilization, domestic revenue collected as at the start of October 2008 was well below that projected. That situation had resulted in the non-observance of one of the performance criteria of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) related to domestic Government revenue. However, in response to remedial actions taken by the Government, the Executive Board of IMF had granted waivers.

19. The third review of the performance of Sierra Leone under a four-year arrangement related to the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility was completed in December 2008. Subsequently, the Executive Board of IMF approved $16.1 million to augment the country's foreign reserve position to cope with external shocks from the unfolding global financial crisis. The completion of the review allows for the disbursement of about $10.8 million, which would bring total disbursements under the arrangement to about $31.7 million.

20. Potential economic risks facing Sierra Leone in 2009 include a decline in official development assistance, the high cost of food and fuel and reductions in export revenues and remittances from abroad. Funding for the social sectors may be affected. Inflation is likely to maintain its long-term equilibrium level of roughly 10 per cent, perhaps until mid-2009.

21. During the reporting period, infant, child and maternal mortality rates in Sierra Leone sharply decreased. Through a $4.6 million project funded by Irish Aid, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Food Programme, a programme to support reproductive and child health was developed. A pilot district health information system was also established in various parts of the country, and the first Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey, supported by UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), WHO and the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was conducted.

22. UNIPSIL and the United Nations country team initiated a project to enhance the capacity of the civil society in the districts by providing office space and communication and internet facilities. The project allows for the coordination of the activities of non-governmental organizations and strengthens the collaboration between the United Nations family and civil society.

V. Security developments

23. The security situation in Sierra Leone remains calm and stable. Notwithstanding the recent developments in Guinea, there are no foreseeable external threats to the territorial integrity of Sierra Leone. However, considerable socio-economic challenges, including high food prices and youth unemployment, could pose challenges to the gains achieved in the peace consolidation process.

24. Of immediate concern is the increasing use of Sierra Leone as a trans-shipment point for the trafficking of illegal narcotics from South America to Europe, as evidenced by the seizure at Lungi international airport in July 2008 of more than 700 kg of cocaine. Cocaine trafficking represents the biggest single threat to the security of Sierra Leone, especially since drug trafficking tends to be accompanied

by arms and human trafficking, corruption and the subversion of legitimate State institutions.

25. Another security challenge is piracy. On 9 November, armed pirates attacked two fishing trawlers in Sierra Leone coastal waters. The maritime wing of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces dispatched two cutters, which confronted the pirates. A trawler was looted during the incident. Four suspected pirates were killed and five others were apprehended. The Government plans to work with its immediate neighbours to establish joint sea patrols along their common coastal waters.

VI. Enhancing democratic institutions

A. Support to Parliament

26. As an independent branch of Government with a multi-party configuration, Parliament has important legislative and oversight duties that have an impact on the peace consolidation, reform and development agenda of the country. However, resource and capacity constraints remain a challenge hindering the effective functioning of Parliament.

27. UNIPSIL, UNDP, UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration and other international partners formed a working group that coordinates international assistance to Parliament. Training workshops were held for parliamentary committees, and proposals for a new organizational structure and for an incentive system for the Parliamentary Service Commission were developed. In addition, with financing from the Peacebuilding Fund, logistical and technical assistance, as well as capacity-building support, was provided to Parliament, in particular to strengthen its oversight committees.

28. Given the critical role Parliament plays in fostering national unity and cohesion, eight regional retreats were organized for 124 parliamentarians and paramount chiefs between October and December 2008. The retreats provided an opportunity to address partisan tendencies, reduce the impact of party politics and ethnicity in the work of Parliament and promote collegiality. Also in December 2008, UNDP and the Inter-Parliamentary Union sponsored a three-day meeting of African parliamentarians and support staff from neighbouring countries to share experiences and lessons on the role of parliament.

B. Support to democratic elections

29. On 10 January, the National Electoral Commission conducted two parliamentary by-elections in the western urban area in Freetown and in Pujehun District, in the southern region. The elections were judged by observers to have been credible and peaceful. APC retained its seat in the western area, while the main opposition party, SLPP, won a seat in Pujehun District, thereby increasing its parliamentary representation from 43 to 44 seats. The election basket fund was used to support the by-elections. Capacity-building programmes for the National Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission have also continued, with support from the basket fund.

C. Support to anti-corruption efforts

30. The Government of Sierra Leone continued to take measures aimed at combating corruption. The Anti-Corruption Commission, building on the development of a national anti-corruption strategy, carried out an internal organizational review and decentralized its work. A branch office of the Commission was opened in Makeni, in the northern region, and another office is planned for Koidu, in the eastern region.

31. The Commission also developed strategic partnerships with other national stakeholders. A civil society monitoring group was established to monitor the implementation of the revised national anti-corruption strategy, and arrangements were made for strengthening the capacities of civil society organizations and local councils in addressing corruption. The Peacebuilding Fund approved a project to support the capacity-building of the national anti-corruption strategy secretariat. The secretariat greatly contributed to raising awareness of corruption issues, through a number of consultations and discussions.

32. Following the example set by President Koroma, public officials have been directed by the Commission to declare their assets no later than 30 January 2009, and the Commission initiated the arrest of a High Court judge for alleged receipt of bribes. In a report of 3 October, the Commission raised concerns about the award by the Government of a contract for the supply of 10 MW of electricity to Freetown and observed that procurement rules had not been followed. The Government explained that there had been no acts of unjust enrichment with the award of the contract and that any breaches of the procurement rules were inadvertent and arose from a need to meet a 20 December 2007 deadline imposed by the new Government for the supply of electricity to Freetown.

D. Support to the security architecture of Sierra Leone

33. The major security institutions of the country have continued to show improvement. The strengthening of those institutions in the democratic dispensation is seen as a crucial benchmark for the success of the peace consolidation process.

34. UNIPSIL has provided substantial input in the development of appropriate policing standards for the Sierra Leone police. These include ensuring the availability of credible internal mechanisms for the investigation of complaints against the force. UNIPSIL is also developing funding proposals for the strengthening of the Sierra Leone police local partnership boards, which will enhance police relations with local communities. However, the police force needs continued training in specialized fields, such as airport and border security and the control of illicit drugs, diamonds and other precious minerals, as well as logistical support. Donor assistance will continue to be critical in those areas if the police force is to be able to fulfil its primary responsibilities for internal security.

35. Within the reporting period, UNIPSIL, in collaboration with the Sierra Leone Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force and with the assistance of the Governments of the United States of America and the United Kingdom, developed an action plan to address illicit drug trafficking and organized crime in Sierra Leone. The plan was based on the Regional Action Plan adopted at the Ministerial Conference on Drug

Trafficking as a Security Threat to West Africa, held in Cape Verde in October 2008, and endorsed by the Economic Community of West African States.

36. The development of the action plan was an important accomplishment, as it brought together different security agencies with the common goal of disrupting the illegal smuggling of narcotics into Sierra Leone. With the assistance of UNIPSIL and the Joint Drug Interdiction Task Force stakeholders, standard operating procedures setting out the roles and responsibilities of Task Force members in the investigation of transnational organized crime and drug trafficking were established. UNIPSIL is coordinating the efforts of UNDP, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and other international partners in developing the capacity of the Task Force.

37. The economic exploitation of the rich marine resources of Sierra Leone and the protection of the country's coastal security are seen as crucial and interrelated issues. In the light of recent acts of piracy, the Government, in cooperation with the United Nations system, has initiated steps to regulate and control its territorial waters. The United Nations and the World Bank are developing a system for the monitoring and control of international shipping movements and will propose a national programme to strengthen the capacity of relevant Government agencies. Such a programme would not only enable the authorities to combat international drug trafficking and other illegal activities, but also provide an excellent opportunity to increase the national income that is derived from marine resources.

38. The reform of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces has continued with the implementation of the recommendations of the core review, which foresees a force reduction from 10,000 to 8,500. However, funding difficulties remain a challenge. With a view to improving the living conditions of serving members of the armed forces and their families, assistance from the Peacebuilding Fund has been provided for water sanitation facilities in the three major military barracks in Freetown. In addition, with support from the Government of India, 200 housing units were recently constructed. However, the lack of adequate accommodation and related facilities remains a challenge. In addition, logistical support to the army is still required.

E. Decentralization and devolution of authority

39. Overall, the general framework and institutions for the decentralization process are in place, and successful local council elections were conducted in July 2008. However, in addition to the need to build the capacity of the local councils and ministries concerned, there is a need to promote greater awareness in society of the decentralization process. Accelerating the devolution process by transferring more authority to the councils is vital.

40. UNDP and the United Nations Capital Development Fund have supported local capacity-building efforts. On 5 December 2008, the second assessment of the work of local councils over the preceding two-year period began. The principal objective of the exercise is to ensure the improvement of service delivery by the local councils to the citizenry. The results of the assessment will reorient the development priorities of the Decentralization secretariat and ensure compliance of local councils with financial, budgetary and other guidelines.

41. In addition to addressing capacity-building issues, it will be important to complete the ongoing review of the Local Government Act of 2004. In order to address the gaps in the implementation of the Act, a national decentralization task force, through several consultative meetings held in 2008, identified as requiring clarification provisions relating to the following: (a) the role of Parliament and the provincial coordination committees and the relationship between chiefdoms and local councils; (b) the participation of civil society; (c) local revenue collection, (d) a code of conduct for councillors; and (e) constitutional protection of the local council institution. Those preliminary observations will be used to review the national decentralization policy in the first quarter of 2009.

F. Support to media

42. Radio remains the most important means of communication for most of the people of Sierra Leone. It is estimated that about 85 per cent of the population listens regularly to the radio. United Nations Radio plays an important role, given the quality of its programmes and it almost nationwide outreach. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1620 (2005), the Government and UNIPSIL have agreed on a road map for the transfer of United Nations Radio to an independent public broadcaster.

43. Under current proposals, the State-owned Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service will be transformed into an independent public radio station, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation. The assets of United Nations Radio will be transferred to the new service. With regard to initial funding for the setting up of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation, UNIPSIL has continued to engage with international donors, and the response thus far has been positive.

44. UNIPSIL provided technical support for the preparation of draft legislation establishing the new broadcast service, which has been approved by the Cabinet and is awaiting action by Parliament. The legislation will ensure that the management of the new service is in accordance with international standards. During the reporting period, United Nations Radio received, for the second time, an award from a local organization as best electronic media outlet in the country.

G. Support for human rights and the rule of law

45. Generally, Sierra Leone continued to register a consistent trend towards respect for civil and political rights in the country. Free speech and press freedom were generally respected, but the existence of the Public Order Act of 1965, which criminalizes libel, remained a concern for the media.

46. The Child Rights Act, which had been previously adopted, was formally launched in December. In addition, UNIPSIL organized, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, a national consultative forum on the integration of human rights into the curriculum of secondary schools in Sierra Leone.

47. For the first time in the history of Sierra Leone, there appears to be a change of attitude about female genital mutilation, with some traditional chiefs pledging not to subject anyone under the age of 18 to the practice. The Ministry of Social Welfare,

Gender and Children's Affairs developed a plan relating to the gender justice acts and increased sensitization to women's rights throughout the country.

48. With support from the Peacebuilding Fund and advisory and technical assistance from UNIPSIL, the national Human Rights Commission has become operational, implemented a number of programmes and released its first report on the state of human rights to Parliament. Statutory instruments for the filing of complaints with the Commission and the procedures for conducting investigations on human rights violations were also adopted by Parliament.

49. However, catalytic funding provided through the Peacebuilding Fund will run out in January 2009, and unless additional support is forthcoming from the Government and international partners, the operations of the Commission may be adversely affected. The Commission has therefore has developed a three-year strategic action plan, with technical assistance from UNIPSIL, with the aim of establishing a basket fund for multi- donor support.

50. With funding from the United Kingdom-sponsored Justice Sector Development Programme, as well as the Peacebuilding Fund, and technical and advisory services offered by UNIPSIL and UNDP, legal executives in the judiciary and local court officials have been trained and additional magistrates recruited, and resources, including equipment and vehicles, have been provided to enhance their work. As a result, most of the districts now have resident magistrates, and courts are adjudicating cases on a more regular basis. More than 400 backlog cases have been adjudicated, leading to a reduction in the overcrowding of prisons. However, further efforts will be needed to address overcrowding and to improve the living conditions of prisoners.

51. In the reporting period, UNIPSIL conducted a training programme for 100 police prosecutors and investigators on human rights issues. A programme on gender issues in peacekeeping was also organized for 65 police officers selected for deployment to United Nations missions. UNDP, working jointly with the Government, also launched an $11 million project, "Improving Access to Justice in Sierra Leone 2009-2011", aimed at addressing gaps in the justice sector.

H. Implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

52. UNIPSIL continued to assist the Government in the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations. With catalytic funding of $3.4 million under the Peacebuilding Fund, it is expected that the reparations programme for victims of the civil conflict will begin shortly. However, without additional international support, the sustainability of the programme remains uncertain. One of the foundations for a stronger post-conflict Sierra Leone is to ensure that the tragedies and injustices of the long civil war are remedied. To that end, through the proposed multi-donor trust fund, appeals will continue to be made to support the reparations programme, as well as to help implement the other recommendations of the Commission.

I. Constitutional review process

53. The Lomé Peace Agreement and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report anticipated the revision of the current Constitution, which was adopted in 1991. Accordingly, the Constitutional Review Commission established by the previous Government recommended the adoption of 136 amendments to the 1991 Constitution and submitted its report to President Koroma over a year ago.

54. UNIPSIL, consistent with its mandate, has indicated to the Government its readiness to provide technical and advisory services for the constitutional review. However, the Government has yet to make a decision on how it intends to proceed with the report of the Constitutional Review Commission. The Government is encouraged to move quickly with the review process and to ensure wider public participation as foreseen in the Lomé Peace Agreement and recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The United Nations remains committed to assisting the Government in this process.

VII. Special Court for Sierra Leone

55. The Special Court for Sierra Leone, established to prosecute those who bear the greatest responsibility for the crimes committed during the armed conflict in Sierra Leone, rendered judgements on appeal in two of four cases in 2008, and it plans to complete the third case in 2009 and the final case, against Charles Taylor, which is to take place in The Hague, in October 2010. Because the complete cessation of the activities of the Special Court is anticipated by the end of 2010, intensive planning is under way to establish a mechanism to provide for the Court's residual legal obligations. Key questions that may affect UNIPSIL functions include the transfer and the future use if the site of the Court, and the determination of a location and provisions for its archives.

VIII. Peacebuilding agenda

56. Sierra Leone continues to enjoy relative peace, six years after the end of the conflict. The former rebel forces no longer pose a threat to the stability of the country. However, many of the underlying causes of social deprivation and isolation remain and need to be addressed. For that reason, the Government, its international partners and the United Nations family are moving together in a concerted effort to accelerate peacebuilding in Sierra Leone, drawing in particular from two major policy documents, namely, the President's Agenda for Change and the Joint Vision of the United Nations Family for Sierra Leone, which were issued in tandem in December 2008.

A. Agenda for Change

57. On 1 December 2008, President Koroma issued his Agenda for Change, which lays out the basic policies and priorities of the Government over the next three years and sets out the critical foundation for peacebuilding in Sierra Leone.

58. The Agenda recognizes the country's formidable socio-economic challenges and argues that the primary route out of the extreme poverty that afflicts more than 60 per cent of the population will require the fundamental transformation of the economy of Sierra Leone by combining economic growth with sustained human development. The Agenda identifies the Government's main priorities as enhancing the supply of reliable electricity; promoting economic growth, in particular through agriculture and the exploitation of fisheries; improving the country's infrastructure; and accelerating human development through improved health education and other vital social services. In addition, the prevention of HIV/AIDS and the mitigation of its effects will remain a priority for the Government.

59. In his Agenda for Change, the President identified the continued threat of corruption, the emerging threat of illicit drug trafficking and the increasing threat emanating from large-scale youth unemployment as the three main and immediate risks to peace and stability in Sierra Leone. The President unequivocally reiterated his Government's commitment to tackling those challenges.

60. Funding required to achieve the objectives outlined in the President's Agenda is estimated at $2.1 billion. The Government and its development partners have made commitments to provide $1.2 billion within the medium-term expenditure framework.

B. Joint Vision of the United Nations Family for Sierra Leone

61. In order to channel effectively all available resources for the development of Sierra Leone and to ensure strong coordination, my Executive Representative, in collaboration with national and international stakeholders, developed a Joint Vision of the United Nations Family for Sierra Leone — a common strategy which is fully supported by the United Nations agencies and programmes operating in the country and endorsed by the Government.

62. The Joint Vision brings together the political mandate of UNIPSIL with the development and humanitarian mandates of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, and defines the contribution of the United Nations system in the implementation of the President's Agenda for Change and the Sierra Leone poverty reduction strategy. In addition to the overall objective of assisting the Government in consolidating peace, the Joint Vision identifies four main programmatic priorities: (a) the economic integration of the rural areas; (b) the engagement of unemployed youth; (c) equitable access to health care; and (d) the enhancement of good governance.

63. The World Bank, the African Development Bank, IMF, the development partners and the Peacebuilding Commission have associated themselves with the Joint Vision. The endorsement will allow for a coherent peacebuilding strategy to be embedded in development assistance to Sierra Leone. It will also help achieve the goals of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

64. On the basis of the priorities set out in the Joint Vision, specific programme interventions will be developed and implemented through a multi-donor trust fund to be administered by UNDP. The trust fund is designed specifically to attract donors who have no representation in Sierra Leone and wish to use the services and capacities of the United Nations family in the country. Furthermore, with a view to

strengthening the United Nations ability to deliver as one, a number of common services have been established. These include the creation of four joint regional United Nations field offices, as well as joint logistical, security, medical and vehicle maintenance services.

IX. Activities of the Peacebuilding Commission

65. Sierra Leone continued to receive the support of the Peacebuilding Commission. With strong leadership from Ambassador Frank Majoor of the Netherlands, Chairman of the country-specific meeting on Sierra Leone, the Commission has served as an important forum for drawing continued attention to the challenges facing the peace consolidation process in the country. It has also provided an opportunity for Sierra Leone to mobilize development assistance. In accordance with its mandate, UNIPSIL provided support for the engagement of the Commission with Sierra Leone, including in assisting with preparations for the second biannual review of the Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework, held in New York on 15 December 2008.

66. More than 90 per cent of the $35 million granted to Sierra Leone from the Peacebuilding Fund has been disbursed for implementation of 14 projects in support of the efforts of the Government of Sierra Leone in critical peacebuilding areas. A total of 4 projects have been completed, and 10 are in progress. A technical committee has made a recommendation to the Steering Committee of the Fund, which is co-chaired by my Executive Representative and the Government of Sierra Leone, that the unallocated funds be used for a number of other important projects, including the ongoing development of an independent national public broadcasting service for Sierra Leone.

67. At its second review meeting of the implementation of the Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework, the Peacebuilding Commission noted progress made in the areas of anti-corruption, decentralization, local governance, public sector reform and the creation of an enabling environment for private-sector development. At the same time, the Commission called on the Government to redouble its efforts aimed at promoting national unity and inter-party dialogue, as well as implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Government was further requested to finalize its aid coordination mechanisms and the second poverty reduction strategy paper. The United Nations and the Commission pledged to support the Government's Agenda for Change, as well as to encourage international assistance to mitigate the threats posed by illicit drug trafficking and piracy.

X. Observations

68. With support from the United Nations and other international partners, Sierra Leone has continued to make progress in the consolidation of peace. However, more remains to be done to make the achievements irreversible, especially by addressing the root causes of the country's recent conflict. In that respect, I am encouraged by the progressive demonstration of the requisite political will shown by the Government of President Koroma to tackle the country's challenges in a forthright and peaceful manner. The successful conduct of the local council polls in July 2008,

following the peaceful presidential and legislative elections in August 2007, demonstrated vividly that a democratic culture has begun to take root in Sierra Leone.

69. As further steps are taken to consolidate the democratic gains made thus far, it is important for all segments of Sierra Leonean society, including the Government, political parties and civil society, to work together to enhance national cohesion and political reconciliation. There is a particularly urgent need for greater efforts to meet crucial socio-economic challenges, including poor infrastructure and an extremely low revenue base.

70. The progress in Sierra Leone is a result of the commitment of its people and leaders to peace and the strong support given by international partners, including the United Nations system. At this crucial juncture of peacebuilding, I appeal to Member States and the international community as a whole to continue to extend support to Sierra Leone, in particular to the implementation of the President's Agenda for Change.

71. Greater efforts are needed to ensure the implementation of the Government's anti-corruption strategy. Illicit drug trafficking, a new phenomenon with huge potential for disrupting the security and socio-economic stability of the country, and, indeed, the region, has to be addressed before it takes root and poses even greater dangers. Youth unemployment remains the most acute concern. Urgent action is therefore required to create employment opportunities with a view to reducing the lingering effects of the marginalization of the country's young people, who constitute the largest segment of the population.

72. The Government of Sierra Leone and the international community should continue to pay close attention to the plight of the victims of the devastating civil war in the country and make sure that they receive the care and rehabilitation they need. In that connection, I wish to draw attention to the planned reparations programme for victims of the civil war, which received initial funding from the Peacebuilding Fund, but whose long-term viability requires additional resources.

73. I commend the efforts made by the Peacebuilding Commission to assist the Government of Sierra Leone in broadening its donor base. Those efforts will need to be intensified in view of the world wide financial crisis, which is likely to affect overseas development assistance. I am equally encouraged by the measures undertaken by the Government to expand and strengthen cooperation with countries in its immediate neighbourhood and beyond.

74. I am especially concerned about the growing threat posed by international drug traffickers who use Sierra Leone as a trans-shipment point. Given the nascent state of State institutions tasked with combating the menace and the likely adverse impact of illegal narcotics on various facets of Sierra Leonean society, it is critical that the country's overall capacity to address this issue be further enhanced, including by assisting the country in combating the growing problem of sea piracy in its coastal waters.

75. In conclusion, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the international partners of Sierra Leone and other Member States for their continued assistance to the country. I would like to reiterate the continued commitment of the United Nations to supporting the Government of Sierra Leone in its efforts to implement the President's Agenda for Change. I also wish to thank my Executive

Representative, Michael von der Schulenburg, UNIPSIL staff and all members of the United Nations country team for their tireless efforts in implementing the mandate of the mission.